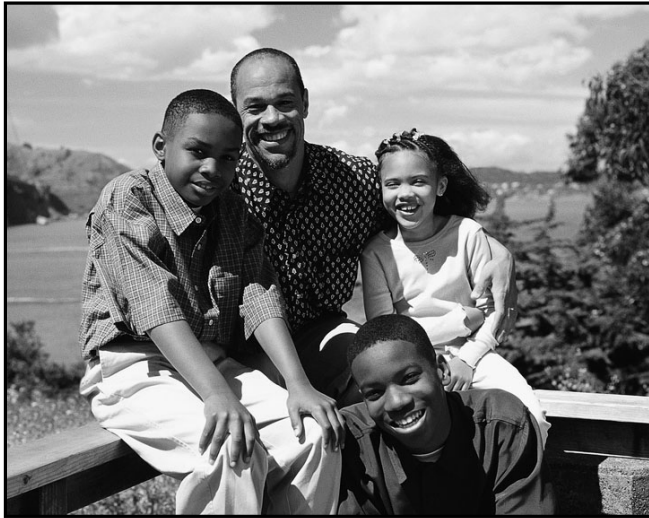


GUARDING CHILDHOOD



Children often admire older peers – a friend, sibling or celebrity who seems cool and in the know—and we live in a culture that urges them to follow in others' footsteps by offering access to clothing, music and movies or TV shows with adult themes.

As a parent, guarding their childhood may mean sometimes saying no, with the understanding that just because certain opportunities are presented, that doesn't mean your child is ready. Everything your child is exposed to has an impact, and **it's easy to be over-sexualized at an early age.**

You should monitor:

- **Clothing geared to children that is typically worn by teenagers or young adults;**
- **Music filled with sexual themes and profanity; make-up lines geared to preteens;**
- **Video games , TV shows or movies with a lot of violence or adult-oriented romantic themes.**

Counteract questionable opportunities by presenting your children with age-appropriate activities, entertainment and clothing. When your children complain that they are "the only ones who can't," let them know there are others who can't, even if they are not aware of them. Do your best to make the "here and now" enjoyable, so they are not always longing for the next stage.



PROTECT YOUR CHILD FROM SEXUAL ABUSE

You may warn your children not to talk to strangers, but it's also important to discuss how to prevent sexual abuse.

Talk early and often to your child about how to keep safe, and remain alert yourself to help your child avoid harmful situations.

Sexual abuse occurs at all ages, and 9 years old is the median age for reported abuse.

Girls aren't the only victims. While 1 in 4 females is sexually abused before age 18, 1 in 6 boys is sexually abused during that same time frame.

About 40 percent of victims are abused by older or larger children they know. Only 10 percent are abused by strangers.

Teach your children to tell a trusted adult if someone touches them inappropriately and tell them never to keep secrets from you.

Reassure your child that you will believe him and seek help if he shares that he has been abused.

If your child shares with you that she has been touched inappropriately or worse, contact your local law enforcement agency or social services department immediately.



Source: Darkness to Light, Statistics Surrounding Child Sexual Abuse, www.D2L.org



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1-800-552-7096 Virginia Child Abuse Hotline (language line available) 800-CHILDREN (800-244-5373) Parent Helpline